



Cost-benefit Assessment of Pennsylvania’s Approach to Youth Crime Prevention Shows Dramatic Return on Investment

Over the past decade, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) has made a considerable investment in supporting youth crime and drug use prevention by funding and supporting a menu of proven-effective (evidence-based) programs. Implemented in over 120 communities throughout the Commonwealth, these programs have been effective in preventing adolescent problem behaviors and promoting positive youth development. Even when programs are effective however, policymakers must consider the investment of public resources necessary to support these programs, and balance that investment with funds required to support the formal criminal justice system (i.e., police, courts, and corrections).

In 2008, the Prevention Research Center at Penn State University conducted a cost-benefit assessment of PCCD’s approach to youth crime prevention. The researchers determined that, on average, for every dollar invested in these evidence-based programs the Commonwealth was saving five dollars through reduced court and prison costs, welfare and social services burden, drug and mental health treatment, and increased employment and tax revenue. When these figures were aggregated across the state based on the numbers of evidence-based programs operating and the average number of youth and families involved, the return represented a \$317 million savings to taxpayers and the Commonwealth.

The researchers examined the costs of implementing seven specific evidence-based programs supported by PCCD and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, and then monetized the value of each of the program’s benefits, to generate a cost-benefit ratio. Using conservative and widely-accepted methodology, a monetary value was assigned only if the program’s benefits had been demonstrated in a scientifically rigorous evaluation. Based on the strength of their demonstrated impact on outcomes all seven of the programs showed a positive cost-benefit ratio, indicating that they were not only “paying for themselves” but represented an additional financial savings to taxpayers.

	Big Brothers/Big Sisters	LifeSkills Training	Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care	Multisystemic Therapy	Functional Family Therapy	Nurse-Family Partnership	Strengthening Families
Return Per \$ Investment	\$1.01	\$25.72	\$11.14	\$3.61	\$14.56	\$3.59	\$7.82
Benefits Minus costs Per Youth or Family	\$54	\$808	\$79,331	\$16,716	\$32,707	\$37,367	\$6,541
Est. # of programs statewide (2007)	28	100	3	12	11	25	15
Est. average economic benefit per community	\$13,500	\$161,600	\$475,986	\$2,507,400	\$12,395,953	\$4,782,976	\$872,133
Total potential benefit statewide	\$378,000	\$16,160,000	\$1,427,958	\$30,088,800	\$136,355,483	\$119,574,400	\$13,082,000

For more information on the Communities That Care Initiative in Pennsylvania, please visit the PCCD website at www.pccd.state.pa.us, or contact the Evidence-based Prevention and Intervention Support Center at www.episcenter.psu.edu, or 814-863-2568.

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